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UNITED STATES
DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20240
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B-23

DEC 7 - 1966

Dear Mr. Chairman:

In 1946 the people of Bikini Atoll in the Trust Territory of the Pacific Islands were removed from their home islands in order to permit the United States to use the atoll for test purposes. The Bikini people were moved initially to Rongerik Atoll and subsequently were relocated on the island of Kili in the southern Marshalls. The United States did not acquire title to Bikini Atoll; the arrangement with the Bikinians was one of indefinite use rights, with the atoll returning to them at such time as United States requirements for the islands should come to an end.

United States nuclear and thermonuclear testing in the Marshalls, and the movement of the Bikini and Eniwetok people from their islands, were viewed with great concern by the people of the Trust Territory. The Bikini people in particular have requested on numerous occasions to be returned to their home. The Trust Territory government has explained the hazards of living on Bikini and of using the resources of the atoll and its adjacent water areas, but the presence of Americans living in former test areas has made it difficult for many Micronesians to understand why the Bikini people cannot live safely in the same areas. The entire matter continues to place the United States in an unfavorable light throughout the Territory.

This is most unfortunate. In the near future it is likely that there will be held a plebiscite to permit the people of the Territory to make a decision as to their political future. It is of the utmost importance to our national interest that the Micronesians overwhelmingly choose to be affiliated permanently with the United States. Consequently, we are very much concerned lest the plight of the Bikini people unduly influence the Micronesians' choice.

The population pressures on Kili, where the Bikinians now live, and the difficulties of maintaining a satisfactory level of living there are such that the High Commissioner of the Trust Territory believes that it may soon be necessary once again to relocate the Bikini people. Kili has been a most unsatisfactory home. The island is surrounded by a fringing reef. There is no lagoon and for much of the year it is difficult if not impossible to land on the island.

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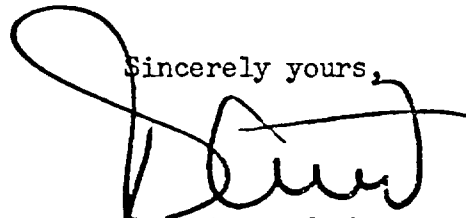
If a further move is necessary, there is no guarantee that the next island will be any more satisfactory than Kili. There is a great scarcity of unoccupied habitable islands in the Marshalls group. Indeed there is a limit to how long we can perpetuate the odyssey of the Bikini people without a decidedly, and I might add justifiably, unfavorable reaction that could have far reaching implications.

Accordingly, we are most anxious to determine whether the Bikini people can now be returned to their homeland under arrangements which will be compatible with their requirements for a livelihood on the one hand and any continuing United States Government requirements on the other hand. A necessary preliminary step, of course, is a finding as to whether Bikini and its lagoon are now safe for continued habitation and whether the Bikinians could have hazard-free use of the resources of the atoll and its adjacent water areas. In the event that the Atomic Energy Commission should conclude that radioactivity levels are such that these people might safely return to their home atoll, we shall approach the Department of Defense with respect to the feasibility of their return from the standpoint of Defense Department requirements for the atoll.

We should greatly appreciate your having this question reviewed by the appropriate personnel of the Commission at the earliest opportunity and advising us whether, from the health standpoint, the Bikinians might be returned. If there should be some limitations, either as to specific areas or as to specific resources, we should appreciate your advice concerning these limitations as well.

Your sympathetic consideration of this request will be greatly appreciated.

Sincerely yours,



Secretary of the Interior

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